

How 250 Spied on Reds for Month Told

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — Twelve-man teams of Cambodian spy troops, trained by American Central Intelligence Agency personnel at an undercover base in Laos, successfully infiltrated deep into Communist territory in Cambodia two months ago, reliable Western sources in Phnom Penh report.

The sources said about 20 intelligence teams of a dozen men each were flown last March from a base near Pakse in southern Laos to secret landing zones in Rattanakiri, Stung Treng and Preah Vihear provinces in northern Cambodia. The entire region has been con-

trated the enemy-held region to pick up a number of Vietnamese soldiers captured by the Cambodians.

The helicopters returned after a month to bring the intelligence agents out, and the teams are now located in territory controlled by the Cambodian government, the sources said.

Some details of the accounts were confirmed by U.S. officials, but these officials said they had not been informed of the full extent of the infiltration teams' activities.

The sources gave this account:

IN JULY 1970, about 250 young Cambodians were selected from volunteers of the 15th Brigade, commanded by Lt. Col. Lon Nol, younger brother of Cambodia's ailing government leader, Marshal Lon Nol.

All those picked had completed the equivalent of the ninth grade. Many were students and all were eager to fight the Vietnamese invaders.

The soldiers were flown to Pakse and at a camp nearby underwent eight months of training. Americans in civilian clothes who lived in Pakse supervised their instruction in map reading, radio communications, explosives, first aid, coordination of air drops and other activities.

Discipline was strict, with minor lapses punished by solitary confinement.

The Americans who trained them did not reveal for whom they worked, but the Cambodians were told by their interpreters that the Americans were members of the CIA.

PERMISSION to train Cambodians in Laos was obtained from Prince Boun Oum, former rightist premier who rules southern Laos largely independent of the Royal Laotian government in Vientiane.

According to one source, agreement to train Cambodian soldiers in Laos was arranged by Lon Nol, possibly through his brother. Lon Nol is believed to have made at least one visit to Laos last summer, and Boun Oum flew to Phnom Penh on one or more occasions.

The sources said the Cambodian intelligence teams were trained alongside a force known as the "White Scarves" made up of ethnic Cambodians from South Vietnam as well as Cambodians from Cambodia.

Despite Cambodia's desperate need for elite troops with specialized training such as that given to the White Scarves, the Western sources said they were used to fighting for the Bolovens Plateau in the heart of Boun Oum's territory. The White Scarves are still in Laos, according to the sources.

BEFORE being flown to their zone of operations in northeast Cambodia last March, the intelligence teams were given North Vietnamese uniforms. This ruse was intended to fool the local Khmer Loeu, hill tribesmen whose loyalty to Phnom Penh was then suspect. The disguise was not expected to fool North Vietnamese units; for one thing, the Cambodians were armed with U.S. M16 automatic rifles rather than the Communists' AK47.

The teams were under orders to avoid head-on clashes with the enemy. Their mission was to spy on North

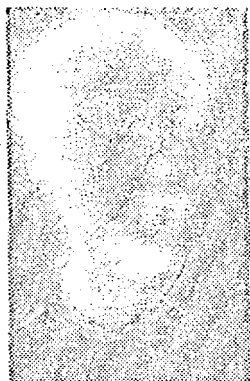
Vietnamese and Viet Cong troop and supply movements and send back information about the northeastern provinces.

One team came upon an enemy camp in Rattanakiri province, near where the Ho Chi Minh Trail runs through Cambodia. The team called for air strikes which plastered the camp with napalm and caused heavy casualties. But the bombs also alerted the enemy, and soon after Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia's ousted former head of state, singled out Lon Nol's 15th Brigade for an especially strong attack in one of his broadcasts over Peking Radio.

THE AGENTS were considered highly successful for beginners. According to one source, the force of some 250 men lost only two men, one to enemy fire and one to malaria.

But the teams reportedly had leadership problems during the month they spent inside enemy territory, and as a result they have been receiving special additional training.

Where they will be dropped next is not known.



Marshal Lon Nol

... gave permission

trolled by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces since early last summer.

The sources said the Cambodian spy teams were flown aboard helicopters from the U.S. air base at Udorn, Thailand. American pilots and crewmen in uniform were aboard some of the aircraft, the sources said.

OTHER helicopters were manned by Thai crews, according to the sources. Thai and American aircraft were also used to keep the teams supplied with food, including American C-rations. American and Thai helicopters pen-